



In 1872, the fledgling Denver & Rio Grande Railroad completed its first stretch of track, a narrow gauge line south from Denver to Pueblo, Colorado, along the east side of the Rocky Mountain front, then west to Florence and another 5 miles south to coal mines around Coal Creek. This initial track connected the railroad to a source of revenue and fuel while it pushed south from Pueblo toward the Rio Grande. In 1874, with local cash and land grant incentives, the D&RG extended the track 10 miles west from Florence to Canon City at the mouth of the Royal Gorge. The last 8 miles of the earlier route, from Florence south to Coal Creek, became a coal branch of the mainline to Canon City. Construction up the Arkansas River stalled at Canon City while the D&RG pursued its primary goal to reach the Rio Grande in New Mexico.

Meanwhile, in 1879, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, through its subsidiary the Pueblo & Arkansas Valley Railroad, leased the D&RG track from Pueblo to Canon City and from there built westward through the Royal Gorge toward the booming lead and silver mining district around Leadville. The P&AV completed 22 miles of track through the Royal Gorge (known at the time as the Grand Canyon of the Arkansas) from Canon City to Texas Creek (the P&AV is not shown separately on the Southwest map, but is the eastern 22 miles of the D&RG Leadville Branch on the map). P&AV construction then stopped when the Treaty of Boston was signed. Under the treaty, the P&AV track through the gorge was sold to the D&RG, which extended it another 90 to Leadville in 1880. In exchange, the AT&SF got the Raton Pass Route to the Rio Grande.

The Royal Gorge line remained narrow gauge until 1888, when it became one of the first D&RG routes converted to dual gauge. In 1934, the D&RG's Dotsero Cutoff was completed and the Tennessee Pass Route was supplanted by the Moffat Tunnel Route as the D&RG mainline. The Marshall Pass Route was abandoned in 1955, and in 1997, one year after the Union Pacific acquired the Southern Pacific and its D&RG properties, the last train went over Tennessee Pass.

Today, the spectacular 12-mile line through the gorge is plied by excursion trains that run west from Canon City, where vintage rolling stock is on display. In 2008, this narrow gauge Shay locomotive #8 was moved from operation on the Georgetown Loop to static display at Canon City.



The business side of Shay locomotive #8 with the Canon City Station behind the engine.. In 2008, the locomotive's livery was changed from Georgetown Loop #8 to Royal Gorge Route #8.





I could not figure out why the Canon City Station is a Santa Fe (AT&SF) station rather than D&RG.



Today's Royal Gorge Route Railroad has fine vintage diesels such as the #403.





The #403 shines while trackside industry crumbles in Canon City.



Royal Gorge Route #402 awaits duty in the Canon City railyard.